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Date: August 14, 2016

To: JaneAnne Murray

From: Amy B. Butler, Mitigation Specialist

Re: United States of America v. Hamza Ahmed, 15-cr-49

On April 25, 2016, Mr. Hamza Ahmed (D.O.B. \*\*\*\*\*1995) pled guilty to a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339B(a)(1): conspiracy to provide material support to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a designated terrorist organization, stemming from events that began on or around November 2014. In addition, he pled to guilty to financial aid fraud, in violation of 20 U.S.C. § 1097(a).

Mr. Ahmed's guilty plea demonstrates an acceptance of responsibility. He is aware of the terms of his plea agreement and is not taking any position contrary to the plea agreement. The purpose of this report is to provide the Court with additional information prior to his sentencing and pertaining to 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a).

In preparation for this report, I interviewed Mr. Hamza Ahmed and made collateral contacts. As of this writing, the Pre-Sentence Report has yet to be completed by the assigned federal probation agent. Ideally, this information can aid in the determination of an appropriate sentence and help create a proactive plan for the rehabilitation of Mr. Ahmed.

**OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS**

Personal and Family Data

Hamza Ahmed was born to his mother, Fathia Good, and father, Naji Ibrahim, in San Diego, California, but came to Minnesota as a baby. His parents immigrated to the United States approximately one year prior to Hamza's birth. His parents were married in Somalia prior to coming to the United States. They officially divorced approximately seven years ago, but their separation appears to have been amicable.

As part of my investigation, I interviewed both of Hamza's parents. Hamza's mother is originally from Ethiopia and she said that she came to the United States knowing "zero English." It should be noted that, despite her best efforts, Ms. Good's accent is still rather thick, making her difficult to understand at times. She was also extremely emotional at times, which further complicated our communication attempts.

Upon entry into the United States, Ms. Good describes feeling as if she were “like a new baby” who had to learn everything. The learning curve was steep, but Ms Good was determined. To integrate into her new country, Ms. Good attended English classes at Dunwoody College of Technology in approximately 1999. While there, she also participated in a vocational program and earned a certificate in cake decorating. This is a career she enjoys and has participated in for many years aside from when laid off. She used to work multiple jobs, including operating a home day care program, but is now grateful to be employed full-time at a bakery in St. Louis Park, Minnesota.

Hamza’s father, Naji Ibrahim, reportedly came to the United States with the advantage of already knowing how to read and write in the English language. He would turn his language skills into a career opportunity, by occasionally working as a translator. Hamza believes his father is fluent in Somali, Ethiopian, English and a few other languages. In addition to working as a translator, his father’s employment history includes work as a taxi cab driver. Currently, he is employed as an independent contractor as a medical transporter for pharmaceutical companies.

Both of Hamza’s parents completed the naturalization process to earn United States citizenship. Hamza’s father became a citizen a “long time ago.” His mother was scared to take the test due to her difficulties with the English language, but was encouraged and taught by her children. Ms. Good worked hard memorizing necessary materials and finally became a citizen in approximately 2012. Her ceremony sounds rather special, with several family members and friends present to acknowledge this accomplishment.

Similar to other immigrants, Hamza’s parents began at a disadvantage. Their determination to build a better life for the family often left Hamza to care for his younger siblings, cook, clean and basically run the household. Hamza cared for the yard, shoveled snow, watched the children as his mother worked, including changing diapers, feeding them and helping them with their homework, and appears to have had more responsibility than most American teenagers.

Hamza also appears to have been more committed to his religion than many teenagers. As part of his Muslim faith, Hamza prays five times daily; including before sunrise, at noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. He also attended his mosque at least weekly, usually on Fridays. Per collateral contacts, Hamza also volunteered and spent a lot of time at the community center.

During my interviews with Hamza, he expressed much respect and love for his family. He described his parents as “protective, in a good way.” He admitted that he “kinda” missed out on a childhood due to having to babysit, but did not sound resentful. Sports and other extracurricular activities were luxuries his family couldn’t afford. Growing up Hamza’s life revolved around family, religion, and school.

In recent years, Hamza’s family grew increasingly concerned related to his being targeted based on his skin color and choice of religion. There does not appear to have been any major incidents, but Hamza stated that hostility was felt. According to Hamza, several members of his community are “terrified” by the media’s coverage of hate and attacks on Muslim Americans. He believes this made some of them hesitant to publicly speak out on his behalf.

The Hamza that was described to me is a kind, helpful, generous young man. His mother stated that Hamza is a young man who couldn't pass a homeless person without giving them money. She told of a time when she gave Hamza \$10 for food, only for him to give it away to someone panhandling on the street. When she confronted him, upset that he didn't use the (limited) money she had given him on himself, Hamza simply told her that, "somebody needed it more than me."

Other family members shared similar stories of Hamza's generosity. I was told that Hamza often played the role of peacekeeper and provided a mellow, relaxed presence when others were stressed. In addition to caring for the young children in his life, Hamza also cared for his father when he was ill, helped elderly neighbors, and was pursuing a nursing degree. Based on the stories I heard, there is likely some truth in Hamza's claim that he was initially attracted to ISIL by recruitment videos that showed children and families suffering and in need of aid (as opposed to violent or anti-American sentiments). Hamza insists his participation in these crimes began out of a misguided attempt to help those suffering.

Several times during my conversations with Hamza's mother, she repeated that she *knows* Hamza. She strongly believes that Hamza's removal from that plane was God helping her by keeping him safe. If Hamza had not been removed from the plane and actually joined ISIL, she is convinced that he doesn't have it in him to do the "bad things" which would likely have been asked of him. She believes Hamza would quickly become the one in danger, killed because of his inability to follow their orders. For that reason, she sees these charges and even his accompanying prison sentence as a "gift from God."

### Siblings

Hamza is the second oldest of seven children born to his mother. Ms. Good said that one of her children passed away, but she did not tell this writer the cause of death. According to every collateral contact spoken with for this report, Hamza was of great help to his mother and father, especially where his younger siblings are concerned.

All but Hamza's oldest sibling (Shahir, 22) were born in the United States. After Shahir, in chronological order, is Hamza (20), Semira (12), Omar (6), Nihla (4), and Salman (1). Hamza seemed uncomfortable speaking about his parents' relationship. He mentioned a step-father, Faud Hassan, but it is unclear to this writer which siblings may not be Hamza's full biological siblings. Hamza mentioned that he believed his parents were considering reconciliation at the time of his arrest. Hamza disclosed that he really wished his parents were still together.

Hamza's oldest brother has not been seen for approximately three years. Hamza seems to believe that he is living with paternal cousins, possibly in Africa. The younger children live with Hamza's mother. She stated that she really misses Hamza's assistance around the house. Hamza is said to adore his younger siblings and they adore him, as well. His last sibling was born in the summer of last year. Notably, his mother advised him of her pregnancy with this child in October 2014, just one month before his abrupt decision to try to travel to Syria. He deeply regrets missing the birth of his youngest sibling due to his incarceration.

Hamza dreams of one day having his own family. He said he wants to have a lot of children. When asked why, he told this writer that “kids are amazing” due to their innocence and “pure love.” He considers raising his siblings to be a major accomplishment to be proud of. He is very grateful to have his siblings and it made him happy to watch them grow. He would like his children to have this same experience one day.

### Collateral Contacts

It may go without saying, but these allegations shocked and disappointed Hamza’s friends and family. They consider themselves to be a “big, loving family,” part of a larger, but close community. It is my understanding that nearly every month, Hamza’s family and friends gather for family council meetings to stay connected. This writer was invited to attend one of these meetings held in the Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, home of Mr. Mohamed Hassan. These meetings are attended by Hamza’s biological family and the men who have *become* family through the years. I was informed that these get togethers can be attended by up to 85 family members. One such meeting addressed how the family would respond to Hamza’s removal from the plane bound for Turkey in November 2014.

In preparation for this report, this writer contacted several members of Hamza’s family and community or spoke with them at the family council meeting. Considering the important role Hamza’s loved ones and community will have on his rehabilitation and reintegration, I will summarize my conversations with them, their occupations, etc.

**Mr. Tahir Hassan** is Hamza’s first cousin, once removed. Mr. Hassan is the person who invited me to the family council meeting. He has been in the United States for 16 years. He works as a rostered Court and medical translator. In addition to this work, he is also employed by Minneapolis Public Schools as a school student engagement case manager. His work takes him “everywhere” within the school district. He meets with students and asks them, “What do you want to do in life?” Then, he helps them achieve their goals. Mr. Hassan stated he has also had many of these same conversations with Hamza in the past.

Mr. Hassan is also very involved in the community as a volunteer soccer coach. Our conversation was cut short by his infant daughter who is home from the hospital after being born a “super preemie.” He told this writer her birth taught him how to be patient. Like the rest of Hamza’s loved ones, Mr. Hassan looks forward to mentoring and helping Hamza get back on track to building a positive life. He commented that Hamza comes from a “very productive family” and gave the impression that Hamza has a great deal of potential.

**Mr. Mohamed Hassan** was the host of this meeting. His home is well maintained, in a quiet neighborhood. He welcomed me into his home with tea, snacks, cake, and other refreshments. He noted, as did others who were present at this meeting, a strong desire to be a good United States citizen while also not losing respect for their own culture. His home decor reflected these values.

**Mr. Zahir Kalif** is another first cousin, once removed. He is self-employed truck driver who has been in the United States for approximately 18 years. Mr. Kalif has known Hamza since he

was born and watched him raise his younger siblings. He believed that Hamza genuinely enjoyed caring for his brothers and sisters. Hamza could usually be found at family events picking up and playing with the youngest members of his family (Hamza has apparently over 150 cousins).

Mr. Kalif described Hamza as “quiet” and someone able to get along with everyone. He was aware of Hamza’s efforts to help others, including his family and beyond. He described it as a family value to participate in acts of charity. This included assisting local people in need, as well as sending money back to family living in Ethiopia.

Mr. Kalif has not been able to visit with Hamza since his incarceration. He wanted the judge to know they are all hoping Hamza comes home safely and is given an opportunity to reintegrate to real life and community as soon as possible. According to Mr. Kalif, the family and community that raised Hamza will rally around him. This experience has been difficult for them all to comprehend, as it is 100% against their religion and forbidden and they are not used to anyone in their large family being arrested for anything, let alone something so serious. It is also contrary to everything they knew of Hamza, which adds to their disbelief.

As a result, when Hamza is released and returns to the community, I am told the family will welcome him back to the family and show him they love and care about him. But at the same time, Hamza will be subjected to a lot of questions, primarily “What were you thinking?” Hamza will know that his illegal activities let the entire family and Muslim community down. He will be required to show remorse for his behaviors and promise to renounce that ideology. His family and community will supervise Hamza closely. And, as is common in their culture, the elders will attempt to provide guidance.

Per Mr. Kalif, Hamza is a “good kid” who never argues and is a “good listener.” Now that the family is aware that Hamza was once susceptible to propaganda, Mr. Kalif believes that his family can help ensure Hamza is never involved in anything similar again. Though the family is close, Mr. Kalif said they didn’t know he needed that type of support before. Now that they do know, they would love to be part of the solution, especially since it affects so many members of their community.

**Mr. Raabi Mohamed Khalif** is a family friend. He is self-employed in janitorial services. Mr. Khalif has been in the United States for 20 years and spoke of “back in the day” and his concerns regarding young people today and social media’s negative influence upon them.

Mr. Kalif has also known Hamza his entire life. He described Hamza as “a good one.” He never knew Hamza to get into trouble, and said instead, Hamza tended to be quiet, preferring to read and spend time with the younger members of his family over spending time with friends. Mr. Khalif wanted me (and the Court) to know that the family takes care of each other and will support Hamza upon his return.

**Mr. Kamal Ibrahim** is Hamza’s paternal uncle. It is my understanding that Hamza’s father still lives with Mr. Ibrahim’s family. As you know, it was previously proposed that, if Hamza was allowed release on bail, that he live with Mr. Ibrahim and his family, as well. Mr. Ibrahim is

clearly committed to helping in whatever ways deemed necessary by the Court, including acting as a chaperone and providing transportation for Hamza to several positive activities (e.g. counseling, volunteer work, religious activities) in hopes of beginning his deradicalization in the community.

Mr. Ibrahim told of how Hamza helped care for other family members. He described Hamza as “polite,” “respectful” and enjoyable to talk to. Mr. Ibrahim was confident that Hamza’s family can support him in ways that will also help protect public safety. He asks the Court consider that Hamza was an impressionable 19 year old who made a mistake. These actions do not reflect who Hamza really is, in Mr. Ibrahim’s opinion.

Other individuals present at the family council meeting, but that I did not have lengthy conversations with are:

**Mr. Mohamed Sani Hayani** is a close friend of Hamza’s father. He drives taxi for a living and has been in this country for approximately 26 years.

**Mr. Abdullah Musa** is another friend of Hamza’s father. He is now retired, after working 15 years at the same place.

**Mr. Kamal Ali** is a cousin. He works as a self-employed truck driver. Hamza was reportedly great friends with his sons, but they were recently shot and killed during Hamza’s incarceration. Their deaths are a main reason why Hamza’s mother believes he may be safest in jail.

**Mr. Mohammed Hassan** is another friend of Hamza’s father and is married to a cousin of Hamza’s. He is the owner of a cleaning company and has been in the United States for 15 years.

**Mr. Kazal Kalif** works for the facilities department at the University of Minnesota.

**Mr. Maruf Omar** is another of Hamza’s cousins. He works in environmental services and has been in the country for 15 years.

In addition to Hamza’s biological parents, it was apparent that everyone at this family council meeting also serves as a parental figure for him. Participants wanted the Court to know that “any parent would love to have Hamza as a their son.” Although Hamza may have lost his way, they feel he still has a lot of potential. It is my understanding that the family pooled their resources and repaid student loans used in committing this offense to begin the process of making amends. They have also demonstrated a willingness to do whatever the Court deems necessary in order to rehabilitate Hamza.

Based on my review, Hamza is surrounded by productive, law-abiding members of society. This should bode well for his eventual return to society, as this is a community that is eager to do all they can to help him succeed.



### Mental, Emotional, and Chemical Health

Although Hamza never personally experienced it, he heard stories of his parents' life before immigrating to the United States. As he understands it, his family came to the United States from a refugee camp to escape a civil war. They came to the United States for safety reasons and Hamza, along with all collateral contacts I spoke with for this report, expressed gratitude towards this country. They are not, by any means "anti-American."

Instead, Hamza said there is no reason to have bad feelings towards Americans. He feels blessed to live here, and singled out "the opportunities, food, and education system." Hamza said that the disparity between his life here and what he saw in ISIL propaganda videos of starving, homeless children was hard for him to come to terms with. He stated that he was drawn to this organization, based on videos he watched showing humanitarian efforts such as providing food and bringing stability with electricity, water, etc. He was swayed by these videos, which he compared to "sad commercials" on television.

Hamza became frustrated and said that he wanted the situation to change. He was idealistic but as he now readily accepts, he was misguided and wrong. During his incarceration, Hamza clearly put a lot of thought into what brought him to this point. He cannot fully explain it, but showed an increasing amount of insight during each subsequent visit. During my last visit with Hamza, he said he understands now that he probably would have lost his life had he made it to his destination and would not have made any difference; the conflict would remain unchanged. He seemed upset that ISIS "used my Muslim faith against me" and "blinded me with aspiration" to help.

This writer is unaware of any underlying psychiatric or cognitive diagnoses that might interfere with efforts to deradicalize this young man. Based on my conversations with Hamza, the ideology which caused him to attempt to board that plane already has cracks in it. His expressed disillusionment with ISIL appears to make him a good candidate for deradicalization and reintegration efforts.

It should be noted that there are also no known concerns related to alcohol or drug abuse. Hamza disclosed that he tried marijuana "a handful of times" when he was younger, but did not like the "lazy feeling" it gave him.

### Educational/Vocational

This writer is in the process of obtaining Hamza's educational transcripts. Based on his self-report, his only behavioral incident occurred 2-3 weeks prior to when he was supposed to graduate. This incident involved an altercation with another student. Hamza was suspended, but supposed to return to Burnsville High School. He says his family was worried about him and asked him not to return. He listened to them and instead of graduating with his classmates in 2013, Hamza earned his GED in 2014.

From the time he was old enough to handle the responsibility, Hamza primarily worked at home caring for his siblings and later helping at his mother's daycare. He reported being employed by

FedEx in Bloomington, Minnesota, but only for approximately one month. He didn't mind the work, but his parents preferred that he focused on his studies. Per usual, Hamza listened to his parents.

Hamza enrolled at Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC) prior to these allegations and again, after his removal from the flight. In total, he estimates that he has completed two semesters of his pre-requisite courses. His ultimate goal was to complete a nursing degree and become a registered nurse, possibly specializing in pediatrics. Hamza felt this work would be rewarding and it was more important to him to help people than to make a lot of money.

Following these charges, Hamza understands that a career in the health care field is extremely unlikely with his current convictions. He's already begun to ponder his future, now that nursing is likely not an option. Hamza is leaning towards a return to school for business classes. His interests vary a great deal, from owning a clothing store to purchasing a food truck. His interest in the food truck is because says he inherited his mother's cooking abilities. Hamza apparently has even been impressing other inmates at the Washington County Jail with the burritos he is able to make with extremely limited ingredients (hot water and rice) and a little creativity.

Hamza describes himself as still in the brainstorming stage of planning his future. He is narrowing down the list of skills and preferences. One example is that he knows he likes to be "hands on" and wants to feel like he is "fixing" something. Although he will not be able to fix people's health issues as a nurse, he remains confident that he will be able to learn another rewarding trade. Other options he is considering are becoming a welder or electrician; he likes the idea of having something to show for his time and efforts.

During my conversation with Hamza, he pointed out that, at the age of 21 and having been in custody since the age of 19, his life never really started. He plans on maintaining a positive mindset during his prison phase of punishment and said he is determined to make the most of it, so when he is released he is able to make it up to his family. He looks forward to the day when he can again contribute to his family and community.

## **SENTENCING RATIONALE**

Mr. Hamza Ahmed was still a teenager at the time of these offenses. He has no known criminal history prior to these incredibly serious charges. Based on my review, Hamza is a thoughtful and loving son and brother. He also appears to have been ideological and misguided, temporarily corrupted by a cause that he believed to be something it was not.

This case is based on Hamza's words, more than his actions. Hamza admitted to an interest in joining ISIL, inspired by their proclaimed humanitarian efforts. There is nothing in Hamza's history to suggest he is violent in nature, yet much evidence to suggest otherwise. Although some of Hamza's social media posts indicate support for ISIL and these have garnered the most attention, there were also several indications in his postings that Hamza was a typical teenager struggling to find his identity.



Much time has passed since Hamza participated in these illegal activities. Even prior to his indictment and incarceration, Hamza was headed in the right direction. He did not participate in the second wave of illegal activity and had returned to school, connected with the positive influences in his life, and started to realize how fortunate he was to have been stopped by authorities when he was. Hamza had already abandoned the ill conceived plan that led to these charges and he should be sentenced in a manner that reflects this, especially compared with other individuals who's actions indicate they remained intent on joining.

As of this writing, Hamza has been incarcerated for over a year and a half, held without bail. He has begun the punishment phase of his sentence and is already demonstrating improved insight into the true nature of ISIS/ISIL. This case is interesting in that there are no specific, actual victims, yet we are all victims of terrorism. Law abiding members of the Muslim community have been particularly negatively affected by organizations such as ISIL. In Hamza's case, Muslim community leaders are eager to be part of the solution and this should be encouraged.

During my investigation, I learned that Hamza has a strong support network and many positive ties to the community. All of the activities and safety measures proposed in his bail proposal remain viable options for reintegration. Specifically, Hamza will benefit from attending family council meetings, seeking guidance from the Imams at the mosques, attending counseling and volunteer at Dar Al Hijrah or elsewhere, and furthering his education and vocational prospects. Public safety concerns can be addressed by close monitoring and supervision, by probation, other community organizations, and his loved ones.

Community leaders are invested in finding a solution to this problem plaguing their youth. Utilizing all resources available to the Court, and not just incapacitation, appears to hold the best chance for a successful deradicalization of Hamza and his co-defendants. While I understand the need to impose a sentence that reflects the seriousness of this offense, it is also important to remember the dangers that can be created by overly suppressive measures. For instance, there is a potential to radicalize others if the prison sentence he receives is deemed unjust and is not accompanied by other rehabilitative measures.

By pleading guilty, Hamza took responsibility for his participation in these allegations. He is eager to make amends for his wrongdoings. It seems he now has a better understanding of the seriousness of his behaviors and is motivated to be rehabilitated. Research is beginning to show that it is possible to disengage and reintegrate individuals like Hamza, but not without a thoughtful approach that consists of much more than just the longest possible prison sentence.

Finally, Hamza has not given up on his future and hopes that the Court sentences him in a manner that shows the United States has also not given up on him.

Should you have any additional questions for me, I can be reached at (651) 231-5356.

Respectfully submitted-

Amy B. Butler